



Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

Gardening for Wildlife

June 17 RCAS Program

Aaron Stump, habitat programs manager with the Indiana Wildlife Federation, will be with us to speak at our June meeting.



Aaron Stump, habitat programs manager with the Indiana Wildlife Federation

His talk, "Gardening for Wildlife," will be an excellent educational opportunity for individuals and families interested in protecting the natural beauty and local wildlife of Indiana. We will learn about native

plants and animals, explore the links between their communities and larger ecosystems, and discover how to create wildlife-friendly habitats in our own

gardens and natural areas.

Aaron joined the Indiana Wildlife Federation in 2016 as habitat programs manager. Born and raised in Indiana, he received a degree in computer graphics from Purdue University and moved to Oregon. While there, his love of nature was rekindled and, after four years, he and his wife decided to move back home so he could pursue a degree in environmental science from Indiana University. Aaron has worked with field geologists and as an intern for the Indiana state government, but his real passion is working for non-profit organizations. He loves to spend his free time hiking, camping, and gardening.

The program will start at 7 pm at the Ball State University Nature Lab at 2500 West University Avenue on the BSU campus. Parking is available in front of the greenhouse and is free after 5 pm. The building is handicap accessible. This would be a great program to invite your gardening friends and neighbors to!

Election of Officers at the June RCAS Meeting

Also on the agenda for the June 17 RCAS meeting is the election of chapter officers and directors for terms beginning July 1. The slate of candidates proposed by the nominating committee follows, but nominations will also be accepted from the floor. If you are interested in taking a role on the RCAS leadership team or just volunteering with us, please contact Rose Jeffery at admin@cooperaudubon.org. There are numerous ways to serve, and we would love to talk with you about them.

For two-year terms, ending on June 30, 2028

- President.....Rose Jeffery*
- Vice-president.....Catherine Kubo*
- Treasurer.....Jim Flowers*
- Director.....Kristi Tuttle *
- Director.....Kelly Miller

For one-year terms, ending on June 30, 2027

- Director (partial term)...Pam Stultz
- Recording Secretary....Annette Rose

*Indicates incumbent

Field Trips

*Everyone is welcome at field trips and programs.
Loaner binoculars are always available.*



Great Blue Heron
adult with chicks
Photo by Jean
David Parlier/
Audubon
Photography
Awards

Saturday, June 6, 8 am to 9:30 am: 4509 W. White River Blvd., Muncie, IN Miller Wildlife Area

We'll take a step back in our chapter's history to walk the trails at the Donald E. Miller Wildlife Area—known long ago as “Sixteen Acres” and a favorite field trip destination for our chapter. Located along the banks of the White River in Muncie, it is a Ball State University field property containing floodplain forest and riparian wetlands.

We'll see the property's Great Blue Heron rookery, which should have juvenile herons flapping about in their nests at this time, and we'll also learn about Ball State's habitat restoration efforts on the property.

We'll gather at 8 am at the West End Overlook parking area, located at 4509 West White River Boulevard in Muncie. Please note that the parking area there holds only a few cars, so everyone is asked to park closely together, in single file. A few extra spots are available on the road's shoulder directly east of the parking area.

June 13, July 11, and August 8, 8 am to 10 am: 4306 Mounds Rd., Anderson, IN

Mounds State Park

Come join a Second Saturday walk at Mounds State Park. **Please note that the start time on these walks is 8 am for the duration of daylight savings time.**

Meet at the Visitor's Center parking lot at 8 am. State Park fees may apply.

Tuesday, June 16, 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm: 1927 E. County Rd. 075 S., Hartford City, IN

Purple Martin Watch Party

On the evening of Tuesday, June 16, we'll join members of the Mississinewa Audubon Club (MAC) for a visit to the home of RCAS and MAC member John Velasquez. There we'll see John's Purple Martin colony in full swing, with nine racks that hold nearly 60 gourds. He'll offer an overview of Purple Martin activity and tell us how he became a martin landlord.

John's home is located at 1927 East County Road 075 South in Hartford City. Parking is available along the long gravel drive (please stick to one side of the drive). Bring a lawn chair, a hat or umbrella to shield the sun's rays, and, if you like, something to snack on. This is a wonderful opportunity not only to learn more about Purple Martins but also to meet some of our fellow birders in Grant County!

NOTE: In case of rain, the trip will be moved to June 20. Check our website or Facebook page for updates.

Saturday, August 1, 8:00 am to 10:30 am: 12308 Strawtown Ave., Noblesville, IN

Strawtown Koteewi Park

Strawtown Koteewi Park, located in Hamilton County, offers more than 800 acres of varied habitats, including 400 acres of restored prairie which should be in full bloom for this trip!

At 8 am we'll meet at the Taylor Center of Natural History parking lot, at 12308 Strawtown Avenue in Noblesville. We'll walk the trails through the prairie and, as time and interest allow, we may also check out other areas of the property.

NOTE: Restrooms will not be accessible before 10 am, so plan accordingly.

Notice of Proposed Changes to the RCAS Bylaws

In addition to election of officers, the business portion of the June 17 RCAS meeting will include a vote on whether to make changes to the RCAS bylaws. There are two changes being proposed. Currently the bylaws call for four directors. This would change to four to six directors, with a minimum of four. The second change is to include the Advocacy Committee in the list of standing committees. The current version of the bylaws can be accessed [here](#), and a mark-up with the changes is [here](#).

Programs and Events

June 17, 7 pm to 9 pm: BSU Nature Lab, 2500 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN

Gardening for Wildlife

Aaron Stump, habitat programs manager with the Indiana Wildlife Federation, will present a program about native plants and animals, the links between their communities and larger ecosystems, and how to create wildlife-friendly habitats in your own garden.

Attend in person or register in advance for the webcast at:

https://bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/sp3yqeFDRy3kd_xfSroKQ

Advocating for Birds and a Cleaner, Healthier Hoosier Environment

By RCAS advocacy chair, Brian Wolfe

If you find yourself disappointed by bills that were enacted or not by our recent Indiana General Assembly, now is a good time to educate yourself on conservation issues facing Indiana and become your own advocate. Knowing those conservation issues that are important to you can be a guide as you head to the voting booth for our general election on November 3 to elect officials who best align with your conservation views.

With ongoing consolidation of newspaper newsrooms, Federal defunding of public broadcasting, and merging of television stations, we have fewer news outlets reporting on local and statewide conservation issues facing Indiana—so how do you stay abreast of important information and be an informed voter?

During the legislative sessions, you can monitor the bills as they move through the process at <https://iga.in.gov/>

Throughout the year, you can also be informed of important issues by turning to the many local, statewide, and national non-profits that advocate for preserving and protecting Indiana's natural resources. These organizations depend on your donations (some of which may be

tax deductible) to continue their important work. See the box for a selection of some I follow and trust to provide me insights on how to be involved. I invite you to consider supporting those organizations that resonate with you, as best you are able.

Personal diplomacy by contacting your elected officials and their staffs through their websites, by phone, or in person at public forums or fundraising events can be a powerfully effective tool.

When talking with elected officials it is important to remain polite, factual, and to-the-point. Try rehearsing a 60-second elevator talk (you can check the web for lots of good tips on these) explaining that you are a voting constituent and concisely sharing why an issue is

important to you and why it should be important to the elected official. To try out your newly honed skill, please consider joining the RCAS delegation next year for the annual Advocacy Day at the Indiana Statehouse hosted by Great Lakes Audubon. It is an excellent opportunity to talk directly with our elected state officials while networking with other Audubon chapters around the state.



RCAS president Rose Jeffery participates in Great Lakes Audubon's 2025 Advocacy day at the Indiana Statehouse. Photo by Anntte Rose

Selected nonprofits

Hoosier Environmental Council
Indiana Conservation Voters
Indiana Forest Alliance
Indiana Land Protection Alliance
Indiana Wildlife Federation
Purdue Institute for a Sustainable Future
Red-Tail Land Conservancy
Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter
The Nature Conservancy

If you have a conservation issue you would like to call to the attention of RCAS, please contact Brian Wolfe at

admin@cooperaudubon.org

Chautauqua Wawasee Waterfowl Festival

By Terri Gorney Lehman, photos by Terri Gorney Lehman and Randy Lehman

On March 28, the first (and hopefully annual) Waterfowl Festival was held in Syracuse, Indiana. It was hosted by the Tippecanoe Audubon Society and Chautauqua Wawasee with the help of Ducks Unlimited and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Karen Troxel, with the Tippecanoe

described how rice grown in the Mississippi Delta is now harvested with less waste, meaning there is less food for the waterfowl wintering in that area. This seems to have led to increased numbers of waterfowl wintering at Goose Pond and Kankakee Sands in Indiana.

Hunter Mentges, a Ducks Unlimited biologist based in St. Louis, Missouri, gave a talk titled *Wings Over Water*. It centered on duck conservation and covered some Indiana-based projects, such as the Jasper-Pulaski and Tri-County Fish and Wildlife Areas and the Potoka River National Wildlife Refuge. Part of his talk focused on duck wings. Male and female wings of the same species are very similar even though the body plumage can look quite different.

A talk titled *The Return of the Cranes to Indiana* was presented by Sam Urquidez of Indiana Audubon Society. There are 15 crane species in the world. Two, Whooping Crane and Sandhill Crane can be seen in Indiana. Loss of wetlands through the early 1900s resulted in the absence of breeding cranes in Indiana for over 50 years. In 1982, re-nesting was discovered in Steuben County, at the northeast point of the state. In 2008, re-nesting was confirmed in northwest Indiana. Now, in 2026, there are multiple nesting pairs throughout the state.



(Above) Pisgah Marsh, photographed from the boardwalk

(Right) American Black Duck

Audubon Society, asked if my husband, Randy Lehman, and I could volunteer as birding guides in the morning. We were stationed at the Pisgah Marsh boardwalk with our scope. and by noon we had spotted 31 species of birds, including a variety of waterfowl: Black Ducks, Trumpeter Swans, Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, and American Coots, among others. Sandhill Cranes, Wild Turkey, Great Blue Herons, Eastern Phoebe, and Swamp and Song Sparrows were also highlights.

In addition to the morning of birding, the festival included lunch and afternoon lectures that were held at the Oakwood Center at Lake Wawasee.

The first speaker, Adam Phelps, discussed Waterfowl Migration. He



The Syracuse Waterfowl Festival was a good day of learning and being out in the field. We hope to see it return next year.

Chasing Melody: Two Years, Thousands of Miles, and What We're Learning

Brad Bumgardner, Indiana Audubon Society

Two years ago, Indiana Audubon's Chasing Melody project started with a simple question. Where do Indiana's Wood Thrushes go, and what happens to them along the way?

Today, we have answers. And better yet, we have better questions.

Since launching the project, Indiana Audubon has deployed tracking tags on more than 40 Wood Thrushes. These birds carry data across the full migratory cycle, linking Indiana forests to wintering grounds in Central America and back. We can now see movements across multiple states and countries, building a complete picture of where these birds go and what they need to get there.

What is becoming increasingly clear is how much of their lives are spent away from Indiana. Wood Thrushes spend more time on their wintering grounds than they do on their breeding territories. That shifts how we think about conservation. Protecting habitat in Indiana is only part of the equation. The conditions these birds encounter in tropical forests and along migration routes are just as critical to their survival.

One of those birds, known affectionately as Kevin, was the very first Wood Thrush we captured and banded at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary in 2024. What makes him remarkable is not just that he was first: He is one we have now followed across multiple seasons, logging more than 3,000 miles between Indiana and the tropics. Kevin helped prove this work could succeed, and he continues to show us what consistency looks like in a long-distance migrant.

What we have learned since then is both exciting and sobering. Individual birds show strong site fidelity, returning to the same breeding areas in Indiana year after year. Their migration routes are more consistent than expected. These data are beginning to pinpoint exactly which forest tracts and stopover locations matter most for the species.

It gets even more exciting. This year, we've expanded Chasing Melody into a new phase, focusing on stopover ecology. In collaboration with partners across the

region, we are studying how long Wood Thrushes pause during migration, where those pauses happen, and what makes a site worth stopping at. These are decision points that determine if a bird completes its journey.

This work is part of a broader effort to connect breeding habitat, migration, and wintering ecology into one continuous picture. Each season adds another layer, another collaboration, and another piece of the puzzle. What started as a migration study is now helping identify conservation priorities across an entire flyway.

None of this happens in a vacuum. The success of Chasing Melody is directly tied to the support of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society and other local chapters. Their investments have helped launch this work and continue to fuel its growth. Because of that support, we are not just tracking birds. We are building the kind of knowledge that leads to better decisions on the ground, from Mary Gray, to migration stopovers across the continent, and into tropical wintering habitat that we visit ourselves.

There is still plenty we do not know. That is part of the appeal. Each tagged bird carries a little more insight, a little more mystery, and a reminder that even a familiar songbird can surprise us. We will keep following them for a better understanding and connection to our own natural world.

Wood Thrush photographed on an Indiana Audubon Society field trip to Costa Rica this winter
Photo by Libby Keyes



Chasing Melody is part of a species-wide Wood Thrush banding and tracking project. Here are all the tracks captured so far, not just those from birds banded in Indiana as part of Chasing Melody.



An Update from the Schowe Homestead

By Jim Schowe

April has always been a special time of year for me. Snow has left the land, and migratory birds are making their way to nesting grounds in the north. Morels are popping up in unexpected places, although evidently not in my woods. Wild flowers are blooming, and the chore of ridding my property of invasive plants is well underway. Chiggers, also known as saber-toothed crickets, have joyously been munching on me for a few weeks now. WHAT FUN!

To be honest, there is no other way I would want to live. I enjoy being a steward of the land.

April this year gave me my third opportunity to see an albino robin. Last Saturday while driving near my home, I saw a pure white bird that was obviously a robin. It was with others of the same species gleaning whatever robins glean in open farm fields.

My first experience with an albino robin was at the Wildlife Resqu Haus, which was operated by my very good friend Diana Shaffer in Yorktown, Indiana.

Diana was a federally licensed rehabilitator and often called me when she admitted something notable. I got to see her first Bald Eagle and a Swainson's Hawk, the latter usually found out west.

Diana had a blind kestrel named Stevie, after Stevie Wonder and the way he moved his head when he played. Stevie the kestrel did the same when Diana spoke to it. She had a Barred Owl who was in love with her and serenaded her each year in mating season.

Then she had the albino robin—pure white with red eyes. I was awestruck. Diana said its outlook was not good, that nature would probably reject the bird by making it easy prey to a predator. So sad.

I had another glimpse of a white robin in a maple tree in Muncie's Thomas Park several years ago. Each sighting is a thrill and I wish there were more of them.

April is a good month, and if any readers are having trouble ridding themselves of those troublesome morels, give me a call and I will help you as much as I can.

Two 2026 Fox Student Grants Awarded

Due to the generosity of Josie and Geoff Fox, the Robert Cooper Audubon Society is able to support two outstanding graduate research projects this year. The recipients of the Fox Student Grants for 2026 are:

Nathaniel Betteridge, master's student at Ball State University, for his research titled "Microhabitat drivers of nestling growth and survival in a wild songbird," under the mentorship of Dr. Kelly Miller.

Charlotte Probst, doctoral student at University of Michigan, for her research titled "Avian thermoregulatory tradeoffs in response to extreme heat events," under the mentorship of Dr. Brian Weeks.

Good luck to both these students in their research. We look forward to hearing about their results.



RCAS in 2025–2026—Your Chapter at Work

June 30 concludes another busy year for RCAS, and we have many accomplishments to celebrate. In addition to our usual field trips and programs, we had three service trips to remove invasives at public parks; we erected a kestrel box and a swift tower on Red-tail Land Conservancy properties; we developed bird-centered exhibits that have been on display at several local

libraries; and we have participated in many educational and community outreach events. This is just a partial list, but it shows how much a hard-working group of volunteers can accomplish.

Thanks to all who donated their skills and time to make these accomplishments possible. If you are interested in participating, we would love to talk to you about opportunities—contact Rose Jeffery at admin@cooperaudubon.org.

Josie and Jeff Fox provided funding for this newly erected Chimney Swift tower at Dutro-Ernst Woods in Muncie.
Photo by Barb Stedman

To Nebraska for Grouse and Cranes

By Jim Jeffery, photos by Rose Jeffery

Birding is often an intrusive activity. To see birds better, we put seed in our backyard feeders, we play recordings to coax them from the safety of their woods, or we venture into their environment—along paths we have created in their forests or in boats that go far out into the ocean.

A group of us enjoyed a very different birding experience in Nebraska last March. Our targets were the Sharp-tailed Grouse, the Greater Prairie-Chicken, and the Sandhill Cranes that were in migration along the Platte River Valley in Nebraska. To see them and their unique behavior, we needed to be as non-intrusive as possible, which meant some discomfort on our part.

On our birding mornings we rolled (cheerfully) out of bed to a cup of coffee (if we trusted our bladders to not complain for a few hours). At the appointed time, about an hour before sunrise, we were driven to or walked to a blind where we sat in the dark, in silence, waiting for our hosts to arrive. In the case of the two grouse species, the blinds were set up next to leks, areas where male birds of some species put on courtship displays and vie with other males for the female eye. The birds become accustomed to the blinds, and the people inside are, it is hoped, invisible. For the Sharp-tailed Grouse, our blinds were a couple of small tents nicely set up with camping chairs and blankets. For the Greater Prairie-Chicken and Sandhill Crane observations, the structures were solidly built, spacious, and equipped with chairs and blankets. The Sandhill Crane blinds were thoughtfully equipped with a warming room at the back (not needed—we were lucky with the weather) and a Porta Potty for the desperate.

First, you hear the birds. I won't attempt to describe their vocalizations except to say that I found the Greater Prairie-Chicken's hoot the most affecting. There are excellent videos available online. As the day lightens, the birds become visible and you can observe them "dancing" and hear their vocalizations. The Sharp-tailed Grouse, with their eponymous tails pointed skyward, crouch and spread out their wings low to the

ground, and their silhouette changes completely as they dance and stamp their feet while they challenge one another. The prairie chickens raise feathers on their heads that look like perked ears, while on the sides of their necks orange

air sacs, sometimes tinged with magenta, puff out as they vocalize. Both stomp on the ground, with the sharp-tails being the louder (to me)—except when the Greater Prairie-Chicken danced on the metal roof of our blind. Luckily, we

were warned this would happen. The activity on the lek waxed and waned, but the interactions were engrossing throughout.

For the cranes our purpose was different. They stand together in and by the Platte River overnight for protection. Our guide said there were, at that time, over 440,000 cranes in the whole Platte River valley. Exciting for us was a Whooping Crane in the group in front of our blind that some got to see. Normally, sometime after light, the birds dramatically take off as one to go to their feeding grounds. Sadly, the group of cranes in front

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Sharp-tailed Grouse (above) and Greater Prairie Chicken (below), pre- and post-transformation





Robert Cooper Audubon Society

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About RCAS

Membership

Robert Cooper Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, and Randolph counties. To join, visit the RCAS website.

Officers

President: Rose Jeffery
Vice-President: Catherine Kubo
Treasurer: Jim Flowers
Recording Secretary: Elizabeth Ploog

Directors

2024-2026 Jim Schowe Kristy Tuttle
2025-2027 Brian Wolfe Julie Bruner

Committee Chairs

Programs: Kamal Islam
Field Trips: Barb Stedman
Membership: Martha Hunt
Education: Abby Shaw
Conservation: Jeff Ray and Jim Schowe
Advocacy: Brian Wolfe
Hospitality: Doris Cheney, assisted by John Cheney
Communications: Barb Stedman, website
Julie Bruner, Facebook
Jim Jeffery, mailing list
Catherine Kubo, newsletter

Contact us

Chapter Website: www.cooperaudubon.org
Find us on Facebook!
Email: admin@cooperaudubon.org

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of us took off before the light was optimal for picture taking. But the experience was thrilling nonetheless.

I say sadly but, of course, this is anthropocentric prejudice. The birds don't exist for our enjoyment. Before the trip, I wondered if our experience would be exploitative and voyeuristic. But the groups we dealt with—the Kansas Audubon Society, which owns the land where we stayed and observed the Sharp-tailed Grouse; the Prairie Wind Birding tour to see the Greater Prairie-Chickens; and the Guided Crane Experience at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary—were all respectful of us and the birds we went to see. We were not, for example, allowed to leave the blinds until the birds had left for the day, a courtesy I found appropriate and touching.

Programs and Field Trips

Most RCAS programs and field trips are free and open to the public. For updates and reminders, refer to our website or join our mailing list by sending a request to admin@cooperaudubon.org.

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Cooper's Talk is published four times per year for members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society. Please submit photos, articles, and events for publication by emailing admin@cooperaudubon.org